353 There seemed to be hardly a thing in the hut
32 that could single out our surroundings for any particular date in the last few millennia, and almost nothing the nomads had not made themselves; either hanging from the lopped and fire-darkened stumps of branches jutting from the hut's timbers, neatly piled against the brushwood walls, or underfoot — guns, tools, choppers, adzes, spades, billhooks, cooking pots, saddles, harness, the tin frills around the icons, and among a pendant grove of dried and shaggy waterskins, a gleaming branchful of new horseshoes. Otherwise, all was hewn and carved wood or homespun from
[251] the backs of their flocks. Aloft, among the sooty twigs and the cobwebs, hung strings of onions, garlic, corncobs, and tobacco leaves. Higher still, the osier-bound reeds of the thatch all converged
123 symmetrically in the apex of the dome. An agreeable and pungent aroma of milk, curds, sweat, goat's hair, tobacco, and woodsmoke filled the place. The thorns on the fire crackled nearly smokelessly, and whenever a new fagot was thrown on, the flames made the tall hut dance in a brief gold concavity above a mob of shadows and lit up the bleached and matted hair and those faces shaped by the blasts of winter and the summer solstice. Their features glittered and flashed like the surfaces on a flint, and whenever my eyes met any of theirs, a smile of welcoming friendliness would answer back.

I had begun to grasp, in the past few weeks, one of the great and uncovenanted delights of Greece; in my case, it was a pre-coming-of-age present. This is a direct and immediate link, friendly and equal on either side, between human beings; something that cuts through barriers of hierarchy and background and money and, except for a few tribal and historic feuds, through politics and nationality as well. It is not a thing that functions in the teeth of convention, but in almost pre-lapsarian unawareness of its existence. Self-consciousness and awe and condescension (and their baleful remedy of forced egalitarianism) and the feudal hangover and the post-Fall-of-the-Bastille flicker — all the gloomy factors that lame and hobble and limit the range of life and deoxygenate the air of western Europe are absent. Existence, these glances say, is a torment, an enemy, an adventure, and a joke that we are in league to undergo, outwit, exploit, and